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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 001347

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: ITALIAN MFA WARNS PRESSING TOO HARD ON QRF
COULD PUT PRT AT RISK

REF: A. ROME 1261
[1](#)B. LONDON 2778
[1](#)C. ROME 904
[1](#)D. ROME 1221
[1](#)E. STATE 40595

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Classified By: Pol M/C David D. Pearce for Reasons 1.4 (a), (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The Italian MFA does not foresee a change in Italy's policy of gradual troop reductions, in consultation with the Iraqis and coalition partners, in Iraq. Barring additional terrorist attacks, the MFA also does not expect major problems with funding renewal for the mission this summer. But it foresees possible difficulties for the December renewal, especially if QRF is part of the package. The MFA cautioned that pushing this point too hard, especially at year's end, might trigger political opposition that could put support for the PRT at risk. (UK DCM said London will be keeping its powder dry on Italian intentions in Iraq until after a new Italian government is in place.) The Italian MFA also is concerned with increasing intra-Shia violence in Dhi Qar, and believes the Iranians are stirring up trouble in southern Iraq. Italian magistrates have taken over responsibility for the Oil for Food investigation, which is expected to be a lengthy process. End summary.

Don't Push for QRF

[1](#)2. (C) PolOff met May 3 with Italian MFA Iraq Task Force officer Stefano Stucci to discuss MFA thinking on Iraq in light of Italy's new center-left government. The MFA does not foresee a change in Italy's policy of gradual troop reductions (in consultation with the Iraqis and coalition partners) and transition to a civilian PRT with several hundred troops providing only PRT force protection and training for Iraqi security forces by the end of the year. Up to 1,000 troops will be drawn down in June (leaving 1,600), followed by another 1,000 before the end of the year, leaving approximately 600 troops for the PRT. Stucci said

this planning was based on the assumption that the security situation in Dhi Qar province will continue to improve, allowing Italian forces to withdraw gradually. As troops depart, more funding will be available for the PRT and Italy's other reconstruction projects in Baghdad and the Kurdish north (Ref C). Stucci said Italy has strong economic incentives for continuing the PRT through the end of 2006 and beyond.

¶3. (C) Stucci, who was present at the April 11 trilats in London (Ref B), said he and head of the Italian delegation/MFA Iraq Task Force Director Ambassador De Martino had been surprised and embarrassed by the Italian military's stark assertion that Italian forces would not provide a QRF, especially because De Martino initiated the Italian presentation saying that Italian drawdowns would occur in consultation with allies and according to the security conditions on the ground. Stucci warned, however, that, given the current political situation, pushing the Italians too hard on QRF, especially at year's end, risked putting the entire mission, including the PRT, under attack by leftist Italian political forces eager to see a complete and immediate Italian withdrawal from Iraq.

¶4. (C) PolOff stressed that the Italians need to continue consulting with the U.S. and UK on their drawdown plans, and that further drawdowns must be conditions-based. Furthermore, it was important for Italy to publicly maintain its commitment to these criteria to avoid the impression that Italian troops are pulling out before the security situation permits or in response to the April 27 IED attack that killed three Italians and one Romanian, which would play into the hands of terrorists. Stucci agreed, reiterating Italy's hope that the situation will improve, but again stressing that Italy would not be able to provide QRF once its forces (except the several hundred protecting the PRT) have

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departed. In response to Poloff's questions as to alternative QRF providers, Stucci said the Romanians, who have a small presence in the Italian PRT, do not have the capacity to provide QRF.

MFA Concern about December Funding

¶5. (C) Barring additional attacks against Italian forces, Stucci did not foresee major problems with Parliament's next six-month funding renewal for the Italian mission (due to occur in June/July). Noting that Iraqi leaders have asked the incoming center-left government to maintain Italy's presence in Iraq, Stucci said Prodi has publicly stated that Italy's decisions will be made in consultation with Iraqi leaders. (Note. Prodi recently also said, "in consultation with coalition partners." End note.) Despite the extreme left's vocal calls for immediate troop withdrawal, Stucci did not believe Italian Communist party (PdCI) leader Diliberto and others were willing to bring down the new government so soon after its establishment over Iraq or any other foreign policy matter. The December vote could be more problematic, he said, especially if QRF is included in the package.

U.S. Should Weigh in Now, Discreetly

¶6. (C) Stucci agreed that the U.S. should "discreetly" lobby members of both the center left and center right to help secure support for the PRT plan and to ensure that parliament passes the June/July funding renewal bill. He recommended engaging with the more leftist elements of the moderate center-left (Democrats of the Left and Daisy) and moderate members of the extreme left (Greens and Communist Renewal), acknowledging that some elements in the extreme left would never change their opposition to Italian troops in Iraq and were therefore not worth pursuing.

¶17. (C) Stucci said senior MFA officials, including A/S equivalent for the Middle East Riccardo Sessa, waiting for the political winds to settle in anticipation of new postings, are being cautious on Iraq and other sensitive topics. Given that caution from the Italian bureaucracy, U.S. efforts to lobby the new government could be especially useful, Stucci said, provided they are done out of the public eye.

Comment

¶18. (C) The MFA clearly is concerned that Italy will not be able to maintain a QRF as part of the PRT. Stucci's message on this was clear: don't push, or we'll lose the entire PRT. This caution reflects the current mood of the MFA as it waits for a new Foreign Minister to be named. End comment.

London: Awaiting New Italian Government

¶19. (C) We cross-checked with the UK DCM, since Italian troops are in the UK sector. He said the message he heard from the MFA was that the only military elements that would be left at year's end would be force protection for the PRT, and not double-hatted for QRF. That said, London will be keeping its powder dry regarding Italian intentions in Iraq until a new government is in place.

Iran Stoking the Fires

¶10. (C) Stucci said the MFA is concerned about increasing intra-Shia conflicts in Dhi Qar, though he noted that disunity among the Shia would make it harder for Iran to exert its influence over them. Stucci characterized Iran's strategy in Iraq as "keeping the pot boiling but not spilling over." In other words, he said, Tehran wants to keep the U.S. preoccupied in Iraq but does not want a full-fledged civil war, which would have undesirable spillover effects in

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the region.

Oil For Food Investigations in the Hands of Italian Magistrates

¶11. (C) Stucci said the Council of Ministers decided to create an interministerial task force (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Productive Activities, and Ministry of Justice, under the direction of PM Berlusconi's top advisor Gianni Letta) to investigate the Oil for Food scandal. However, the task force "collapsed" and now the matter was in the hands of Italian magistrates. Stucci said, given the importance and independence of magistrates in Italy and the MFA's current cautious approach on politically sensitive matters, the MFA was no longer involved in the process, which he expects will take years.

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